

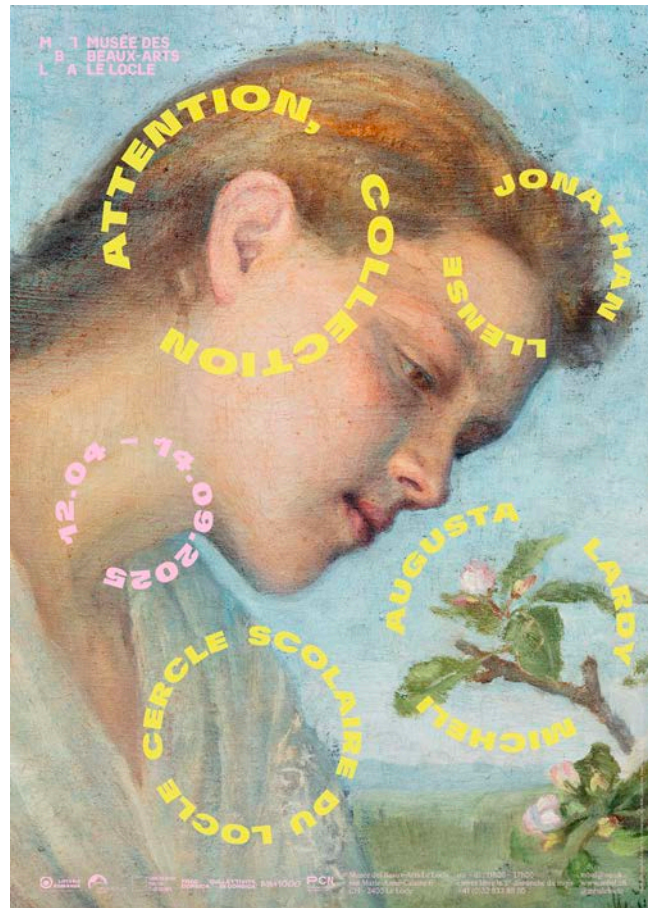
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PRESS RELEASE

SPRING AT MBAL

**APRIL EXHIBITIONS:
ATTENTION COLLECTION, AUGUSTA
LARDY MICHELI, JONATHAN LLENSE,
CERCLE SCOLAIRE DU LOCLE**

APRIL 12TH – SEPTEMBER 14TH 2025



Detail:
Marguerite Sandoz-Jeanneret,
Le Printemps (undated),
Oil on canvas © Collection
Museum of Fine Arts, Le Locle

This spring, the MBAL opens the doors to its permanent collection and reveals its behind-the-scenes process: what challenges does its conservation present? How does it interact with contemporary creation? *Attention, Collection* will shed new light on its works by taking us behind the scenes of how a collection is managed.

Organized by thematic keywords, like archive labels (Abstraction, Helvetica), the exhibition highlights the management of a collection in all its complexity, sometimes ironically diverging from it by playing with traditional art history terms and introducing new classifications (*Nature morte/vivante, Fe/male gaze*). To explore its current resonances, three artists – Plonk et Replonk-Bébert, Ufuoma Essi, and Virginie Delannoy – will present original works interspersed throughout the exhibition, two of which were created as a direct response to pieces from the collection.

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The MBAL will also be hosting the very first institutional exhibition by Swiss artist **Augusta Lardy Micheli**. *Metaxu (les rives où vivent mes songes)* showcases the Swiss mountains and landscapes of the Neuchâtel region through her evanescent, dreamlike paintings.

Photographer and visual artist **Jonathan Llense**, featured at the latest edition of Paris Photo, will create an original portrait of the town of Le Locle titled *Par le biais*, curated by Sergio Valenzuela-Escobedo. His own photographic archives will blend with local stories, the town's fountains, and busts from the museum's collection.

Finally, the MBAL has given carte blanche to the students of the **Cercle scolaire du Locle (School District of Le Locle)** to imagine, through art, a better city. On the theme of *bien vivre ensemble* ("living together in harmony"), their collective works will reflect a surge of creativity and shared hope.

1. ATTENTION, COLLECTION

Drawing attention to the collection, ensuring its preservation and cultivating its contemporary relevance: this is the MBAL's mission, its pride and its challenge. The collection was built up in 1862 by a group of enthusiasts, long before the museum was founded, and brings together some 5,000 works by Swiss and international artists from the 17th century to the present day.

The museum team unveils the behind-the-scenes of this collection and its complex management through a wide selection of objects, presented according to six keywords inspired by an imaginary archiving software, with all its limitations and mysteries.

The *Helvetica* label will explore Swiss identity and the images that have given rise to its symbols and stereotypes, including the bronze head of Ferdinand Hodler by Auguste de Niederhausern, the xylogravure of Monte Rosa by Félix Vallotton and the Suchard-Milka poster created by Herbert Leupin.

Évasion will bring together works that share the theme of exploring states of mind or the exaltation of the senses through acts such as contemplation, reading, or listening to music. Included will be the meditative landscape of Claire Pasch-Battié, the spring fragrance of Marguerite Sandoz-Jeanerret, and *La liseuse* by Albert Anker.

The keyword *Nature morte/vivante* will explore the liminality between a classic subject of art history and its hypothetical opposite, as seen in *The Boy with Pears* by Charles Edouard Félix Clement and *Still Life with Apples* by François Barraud.

Thus, the works of Swiss artists such as Félix Vallotton, Paul-Théophile Robert, Charles L'Eplattenier, Marguerite Sandoz-Jeanerret, and more contemporary artists like Jeanne-Odet Evard, Mai-Thu Perret, and Sandrine Pelletier will be displayed alongside other renowned names such as Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, Lin Pan Yu, Suzanne Valadon, as well as Francisco de Goya, Gustave Courbet, and Henri Matisse.



Georges-Henry Dessouslavy,
Homme au coquillage, vers 1952.
Gouache sur toile, 150 x 72 cm.
© Collection Museum of Fine Arts, Le Locle

“The meta-exhibition Attention, Collection allows us to lift the veil on the inner workings of a museum collection, between wonder and conundrum: a delve into the intimacy of our archives, our masterpieces, and the delicate choreography of our work!”

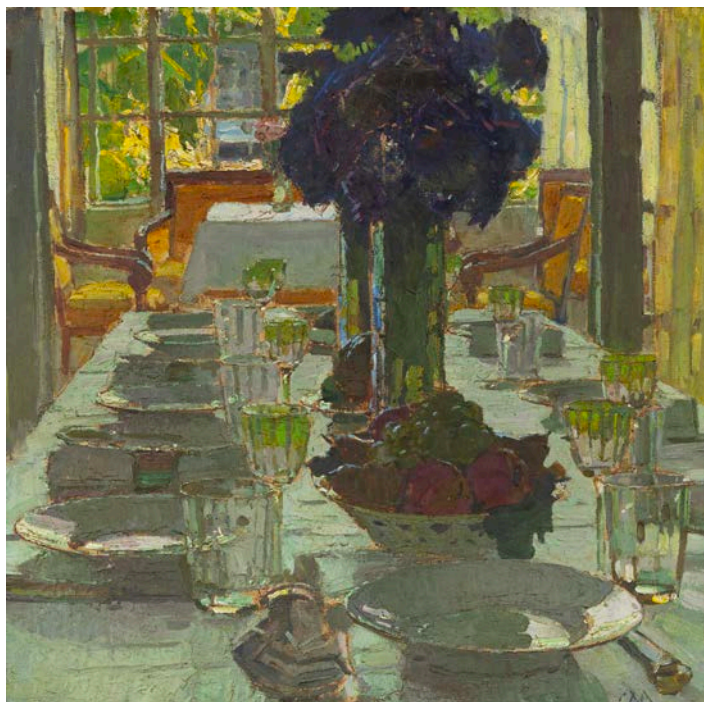
Federica Chiocchetti, Director of MBAL

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THE MBAL COLLECTION

Created by a group of enthusiasts who founded the Société des Amis des Arts du Locle in 1862, the collection is the result of over 150 years of enrichment through generous donations, purchases, and prestigious deposits such as those from the Swiss Confederation and the Gottfried Keller Foundation.

From the 1950s onwards, the Museum of Fine Arts Le Locle has shown a particular interest in prints and printed art. The museum's acquisition policy thus focuses on this medium, favouring engravings by the great masters of the 19th and early 20th centuries, while also supporting contemporary Swiss production.



Today, acquisitions cover every kind of media, and the museum's collection comprises more than 5,000 objects. It includes a remarkable number of paintings, sculptures and objects of applied art, as well as prints, posters, drawings, watercolours and photographs by Swiss and international artists, from the 17th century to the present day.

Carl Moll, *Der gedeckte Tisch*, 1937.
Oil on canvas, 60.2 x 60.5 cm.
© Collection Museum of Fine Arts, Le Locle



Félix Edouard Vallotton, *Le Mont-Rose*, 1897. Xylogravure, 14 x 25,5 cm.
© Collection Museum of Fine Arts, Le Locle

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A contemporary activation of the masterpieces in the collection

Three contemporary artists – **Plonk et Replonk-Bébert**, **Ufuoma Essi**, and **Virginie Delannoy** – have been invited to create surprising encounters between the works in the collection and to reflect on the stories that unfold within a museum setting.

Plonk et Replonk-Bébert

Plonk et Replonk-Bébert, renowned for his irreverent humour and satirical eye, subtly explores the relationship between image and words to question our perception of the female body. Through a series of interventions blending visual subversion and wordplay, he challenges the dominant representations and stereotypes that are embedded in the collective imagination, which he detects in the selected works of *Nature Morte/Vivante et Fe/Male Gaze*.



Portrait de Bébert © Plonk et Replonk

Plonk & Replonk-Bébert is one of the historical co-founders of Plonk & Replonk in the 1990s.

Originally from the Jura region, Bébert is a trained graphic designer. This (bad) student taught himself phot-engraving, which became his main profession.

*The Plonk & Replonk collective of publishers, of which Bébert was a member, was formed in 1995 in La Chaux-de-Fonds (Switzerland), and is renowned for its photomontages and postcard transformations, some of which have been published in the daily *Le Temps* and the monthly *Fluide glacial*, as well as books, calendars, stickers and more...*

Ufuoma Essi

London-born filmmaker Ufuoma Essi will be presenting the previously unseen video *The Choirs of Nebbio*. This experimental short film, based in the Nebbio region of Corsica, explores the relationship between religion, history, memory and landscape. The film examines France's colonial legacy in Corsica and the role that language and religion play in maintaining forms of cultural domination. It weaves together fictional narratives, traditional polyphonic songs and images shot on location in 16mm and inspired by Mary Lou Williams' *Black Christ of the Andes* (St. Martin de Porres), Corsican religious festivals and audio stories from the Nebbio region and beyond.



Portrait of Ufuoma Essi © Ufuoma Essi

Ufuoma Essi is a filmmaker and artist based in south-east London, whose work explores film, video, photography, and sound. Drawing on archives, she examines the silences of history through a Black feminist and diasporic perspective.

Her work has been presented in international institutions and festivals such as the South London Gallery, Gasworks, the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, and Hot Docs. A recipient of several residencies, she was notably selected for the Bloomberg New Contemporaries programme in 2020.

This project is co-produced with the Fondation Taurus pour l'Art et les Sciences and the Frac Corsica.

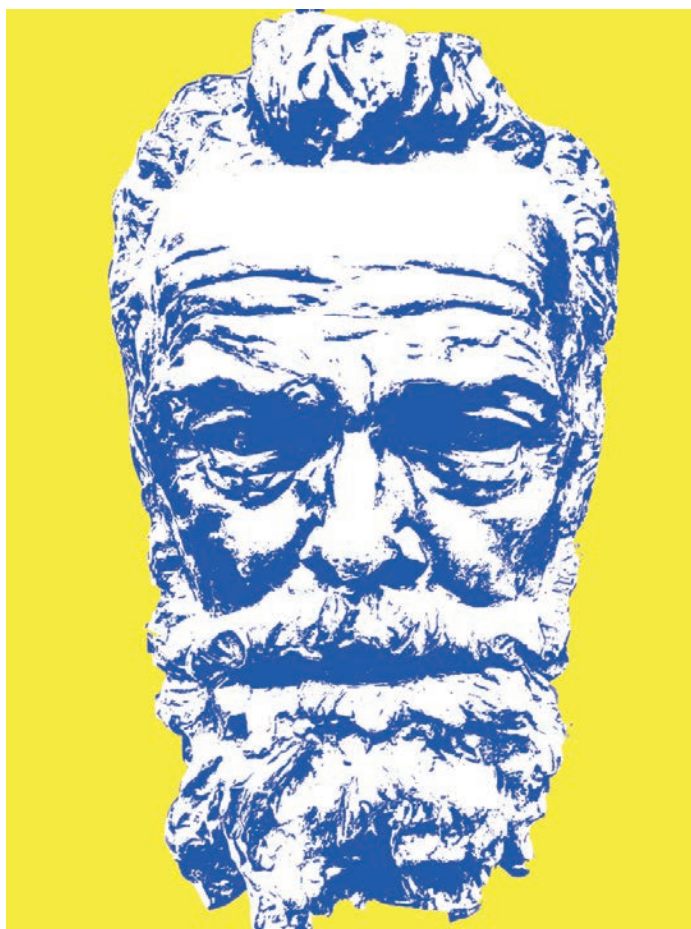
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Virginie Delannoy

The artist Virginie Delannoy has chosen to interact with an iconic work from the museum's collection: a 1953 bronze sculpture depicting Ferdinand Hodler. By adding her personal touch through her unique technique, she offers a bold reinterpretation of this classical piece. Her intervention, using tape as the primary material, provides a new perspective, inviting the viewer to rediscover the work through a distinctly contemporary lens, where the dialogue between tradition and modernity takes on its full meaning.

On **June 28th**, the artist will invite 6 participants to take part in a guided workshop, with the museum's works using her unique technique, which involves reconstructing an image with pieces of adhesive tape, creating contrasted and visually striking composition.

Virginie Delannoy, a French artist based in Geneva since 2005, explores space and materiality. Initially focused on sculpture and installation, she turned to large-scale drawing in 2018. Her approach plays on the transformation of materials, particularly adhesive tape, which has become a key element in her exploration of the relationship between form, space, and perception.



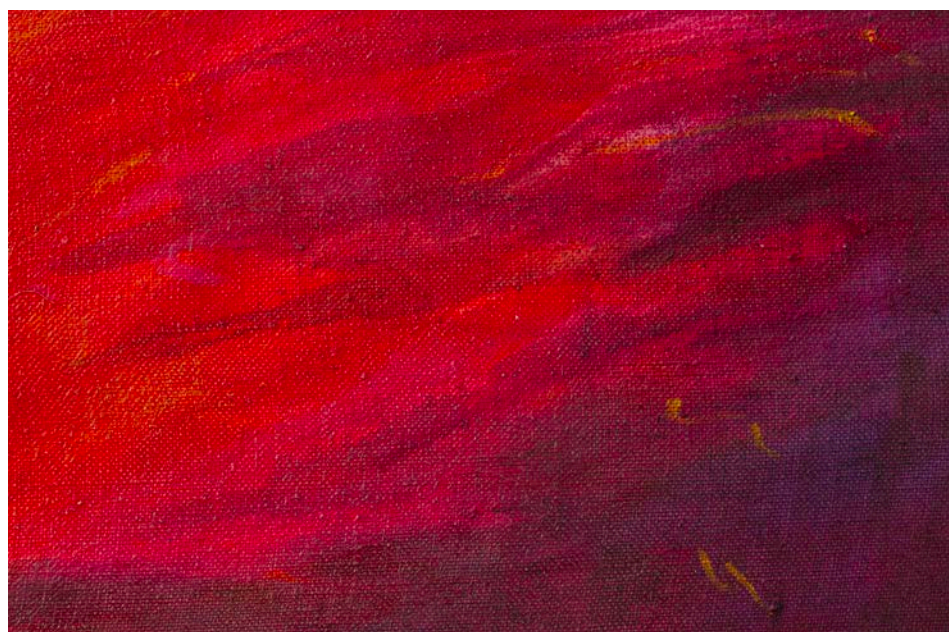
Ferdinand Hodler, Virginie Delannoy © Virginie Delannoy

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2. AUGUSTA LARDY MICHELI - *METAXU (LES RIVES OÙ VIVENT MES SONGES)*

The MBAL presents *Metaxu (les rives où vivent mes songes)*, the first institutional exhibition of Swiss artist Augusta Lardy Micheli in her home country.

Metaxu represents the link between objects and the physical world, where painting becomes an intermediary between dreams and places, between the inner and the outer, between internal images and those perceived through experience. The artist draws inspiration from the shores that have nourished her imagination, those of Lake Neuchâtel, deeply ingrained since her childhood. These hills, banks, skies, and forests, sometimes veiled in her canvases, become a prism between thought and lived experience, expressed through monumental moving paintings and small intimate formats.



“The shores where my dreams live seduce me with beauty, but a warm wind pierces the surface of the canvases. What is this summer night, far too hot, that awakens me from a summer sleep? Should I fear it? This feeling of unease is inexhaustible, and nothing will stop its vivid expression through the Metaxu that is the act of painting. We will not yield to solastalgia.”

Augusta Lardy Micheli

Augusta Lardy, *Le temps n'a point de rive*, 2022. Courtesy Galeria Belmonte, Madrid, Espagne © Augusta Lardy



© Gian Andrea Diana

Augusta Lardy Micheli, born in 1994 in Geneva, is a Swiss artist. She holds a degree in Philosophy from King's College London and a Fine Arts degree from the City and Guilds of London Art School. She was awarded the Freelands Foundation Painting Prize in 2021. Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions in Madrid (Galería Belmonte), Paris (Galerie DS), and Mexico City (Karen Huber).

The artist explores a «living painting» where the material and pigments invite her to relinquish control and allow the essence of the work to emerge. Her approach, rooted in the body and somatic memory, can lead her to radically transform her techniques, shifting from painting to sculpture, engraving, or oxidation. With her experimental approach, she questions the essence of the image, seeking to reduce it to its most fundamental elements.

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3. JONATHAN LLENSE - PAR LE BIAIS

An exhibition curated by Sergio Valenzuela-Escobedo

Jonathan Llense est un photographe au regard de sculpteur, à l'obsession Jonathan Llense is a photographer with a sculptor's eye, a collector's obsession and a comical wit. His photographs feature creations that are the result of combining or reconstructing everyday objects.

These "lost and found objects" recall the humour of Marcel Duchamp and his urinal transformed into a work of art under the title *Fontaine*.

Llense's works capture fragments, gestures and activations of places from his travels or everyday life, extracting a symbolic poetry from them. Rather than representing the world as it is, he invents a light, ironic universe, a utopia where precariously balanced objects take on their full meaning in a snapshot: there is no sculpture without photography. His images, complex but playful, are serious jokes that defy gravity and challenge the established order. Llense plays with cameras rather than against them.

In this exhibition, Llense draws on his archives and, commissioned by the museum, creates an original portrait of the town of Le Locle ('Llense in Le Lloclé'). He combines photography and local history, playing with the busts in the MBAL collection. Water becomes the underlying thread, evoking a history deeply rooted in the region. In a bold scenographic gesture, twenty-eight "fountains" are brought to life, inviting us to an unexpected exploration.

Whether it's humour or absurdity, Llense likes to surprise and make people smile. Inspired by Duchamp's irony, these fountains in Le Locle offer a subtle interplay between clarity and murkiness, an invitation to look beyond appearances.

Exhibition text by **Sergio Valenzuela-Escobedo**



Clementine (with statue), Le Locle 2024
© Jonathan Llense



JMW, 2022 Courtesy Espace Jörg Brockmann

"It is through wanderings in the city and daily peregrinations that my work takes shape. Guided by an initial intuition, I play with my environment by composing or recomposing with the elements present, disregarding any spatio-temporal relationship in order to build a new and playful perception. I offer an amused gaze on the things around us, on these daily scenes, and reveal their potential for playful experimentation."

Jonathan Llense

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© Jonathan Llense



Jonathan Llense

Born in 1984, Llense is a photographer and visual artist based in Paris. A graduate of the Écoles des Beaux-Arts in Valenciennes and the photography school in Arles, he exhibited at the IFAL Gallery of Mexico in 2014 after a residency in Mexico. That same year, he participated in the *Inside/Outside Territory* exhibition in Amsterdam. In 2016, he published *L'Heure du Tigre*, a work born from a residency at Paradou. He continued his career with several residencies and exhibitions, including at

the UNSEEN Photo Fair and the Imago Lisboa Festival in 2019. In 2021, he published *Uncertain Life & Sure Death*, and in 2023, his third book in the *Fashion Eye* collection by Louis Vuitton. Llense collaborates with international magazines and prestigious brands and has been working with the Jörg Brockmann Gallery and TheLink Mgmt agency since 2018.

Sergio Valenzuela-Escobedo

The Chilean researcher and doctor in photography explores the origins of the camera in South America. He has curated exhibitions such as *Mapuche* at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (2017), as well as *Monsanto: A Photographic Investigation* (2017) and *Geometric Forests* (2022), both of which were presented for the first time at the Rencontres d'Arles. In 2025, he will be an invited curator for the Ci.CLO Bienal Fotografia do Porto. He also directs DoubleDummy and various mentoring programs.

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Margaux et Soulayma (9FR1), *L'empathie*, 2024. Gouache, 29,7 x 42 cm. © Cercle scolaire du Loclc



Malou (10FR2), *Le respect*, 2024. Gouache, 21 x 29,7 cm. © Cercle scolaire du Loclc

4. CERCLE SCOLAIRE DU LOCLC - BIEN VIVRE ENSEMBLE

The Commune of Le Loclc places quality of life at the heart of its concerns. Through a joint project involving the town's various institutions, pupils from the Cercle scolaire worked with their teachers on the theme of "living together in harmony" and identified the values that foster learning, growth, and harmonious interaction.

Working as classes and in groups, the pupils expressed these shared values through drawings, posters, crafts, audio pieces and other productions, following their inspiration. For the first time, they will be exhibited at MBAL as real artists in two rooms of the museum: the Salle Marie-Anne

Calame, dedicated to the young public, and the adjoining room.

This project was set up by the Service Promotion Santé Jeunesse et le Service Socio-Éducatif du CSLL with the support of the School Directorate.



Lucie (11FR3), *La persévérance*, 2024. Gouache, 21 x 29,7 cm. © Cercle scolaire du Loclc

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THE OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 2025

The Printemps Culturel Neuchâtelois in the new MBAL library

For ten years, the Printemps Culturel Neuchâtelois has invited the residents of the canton to explore the paths of distant or nearby regions of the world, primarily characterised by the diversity and dynamism of their culture. To celebrate the 6th edition of this unmissable cantonal event, the spotlight will shine on the Korean Peninsula from **March 20th to June 21st 2025**.

The MBAL is delighted to celebrate **K-culture** by presenting a selection of works by Korean artists in its new library, located in the café space. This collection has been carefully curated by creative director and designer An Mano, based in Seoul.

Expositions from October 11th 2025 to March 1st 2026

**KOENRAAD DEDOBBELEER,
KLODIN ERB,
AGNÈS GEOFFRAY & VANESSA DESCLAUX,
URS LÜTHI,
COLLECTION MBAL**

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS LE LOCLE

The Museum of Fine Arts Le Locle (MBAL) is a leading institution in Switzerland with international reach, known for its bold and accessible programming. The museum offers monographic and thematic exhibitions that expand perspectives and bring together art from both the past and present, from here and abroad, by fostering dialogue between works from its collection and contemporary Swiss and international creations.

Located in the town centre of Le Locle and founded in 1862, the MBAL, housed in a magnificent Art Nouveau building renovated in 2014, features 800m² of exhibition space and a virtual platform for digital art, ORBIT_E. The collection, which includes around 5,000 works, including paintings, sculptures, and works on paper by Swiss and international artists from the 17th century to the present day, and includes prestigious deposits such as those from the Swiss Confederation and the Gottfried Keller Foundation.

Under the direction of curator and writer Federica Chiocchetti (PhD) since 2022, who is sensitive to gender equality, the acquisition policy aims to achieve parity.



Facade of the Museum. © 2024, Museum of Fine Arts, Le Locle. Photo: Lucas Olivet. All rights reserved

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Wednesday - Sunday: 11h00 - 17h00

First Sunday of the month: free entry

The project of Ufuouama Essi is co-produced with the Fondation Taurus pour l'Art et les Sciences and the Frac Corsica

